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Reconsidering Southern African Studies from the Indian Ocean

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Durban and Cape Town as Port Cities: Reconsidering Southern African Studies from the Indian Ocean

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This special issue arose out of a workshop titled ‘Durban and Cape Town as Indian Ocean Port Cities: Reconsidering Southern African Studies from the Indian Ocean’, held at the University of the Western Cape in September 2014. The volume is located at the intersection of southern African studies and Indian Ocean studies, and explores this exchange as a site for enriching southern African transnational historiographies.

This introduction begins with an overview of emerging transnational trends within southern African studies, and locates Indian Ocean studies within this field. Until recently, southern African studies fell outside the remit of work on the Indian Ocean world on two counts. First, the region is located outside the monsoon zone, which constitutes the canonical core of Indian Ocean studies; secondly, Africa as a whole has been marginalised by South Asia in the field.¹ For some time, then, southern Africa has been considered as a belated arrival both chronologically and historiographically in the field of Indian Ocean studies, drawn into the latter arena only during the age of European empires.

This collection complicates this picture, exploring the effect of pre-colonial Indian Ocean slave and trade networks on southern African colonial formations. These re-configured geographies, in turn, open up possibilities for drawing new linkages among different southern African historiographies. The articles articulate land- and sea-based systems of labour migration and control, suggesting connections between the inland historiographies of mining and migration, on the one hand, and maritime port cities, on the other (and indeed, between these port cities themselves). The volume raises questions of method and scale, and the introduction touches on problems associated with an oceanic approach (how to factor in the ‘sea-ness of the sea’). In concluding, the introduction asks how best to switch between region or area and a global perspective.

Southern African Studies and Transnationalism

The field of southern African studies is no stranger to transnational work and has long enabled scholarship with a global inflection. Themes include slavery, black transnationalism and the transatlantic connection, indentured labour, diasporic studies, European imperialisms, migration, medicine and healing, crime, radical international movements (communism, anarchism, and so on), world religions, media, and music. Yet these traditions of scholarship were seldom able to realise their full transnational potential, having been sidelined by ‘hydrophasic’ land-based

1 The famous ‘Africa-phasic’ work is K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985).

models of area studies or anti-apartheid nationalism.² The global turn across the international academy has, however, allowed these themes to emerge more fully, and there is now a growing transnational historiography fashioned out of the fulcrum of southern African studies.

The post-Cold War context, in which current forms of global history began to intersect with southern African studies, has shaped the concerns of this work. This context includes the ‘double transition’ to democracy and neoliberal globalisation; the rise of India, China and the idea of the ‘global south’; and the withering of an anti-apartheid national narrative under the pressure of post-apartheid problems (human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome [HIV/AIDS], consumerism, crime, corruption). These southern-African-shaped transnational histories respond to an era in which post-apartheid, post-national, and post-Cold War imperatives meet the exigencies of ‘the Asian century’.³

This matrix has prompted a rich repertoire of transnational scholarship (much published in this journal). Pertinent themes include accounts of the anti-apartheid movement as a global phenomenon, analyses of South Africa as a sub-imperial power, and re-interpretations of labour and migration (the staple of a national historiography) on a larger transnational canvas.⁴ A related theme has been a re-engagement with oceanic and maritime history. This development has entailed a return to older domains of European maritime empires via the route of social history/history from below. Themes include slavery, forced migration and unfree labour; the state’s attempts to regulate movement across its littoral borders; smuggling and shadow economies; and maritime labour.⁵ Together, these lines of enquiry furnish new angles on questions of state and nation. A perspective from the sea opens South African history up to its multiple inheritances, shifting previously minoritised groups into the mainstream and enlarging a definition of the nation. The state itself starts to appear less solid and powerful as accounts of smuggling reveal its porousness, while its attempts to fortify its littoral borders against ‘undesirables’ demonstrate how maritime border-making shapes cultures of governmentality.

Indian Ocean Studies and Southern African Studies

The Indian Ocean has provided one template through which to explore these emergent themes. As the world’s oldest long-distance transoceanic trading arena, the monsoon Indian Ocean world has been constituted by a lattice of dense linkages woven through trade and Islam. The age of European empires and the advent of steam travel precipitated massive global migration

2 ‘Hydrophasic’ is a word from M. Cohen, *The Novel and the Sea* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 3, cited by Meg Samuelson and Charne Lavery elsewhere in this issue.

3 I. Hofmeyr, ‘African History and Global Studies: A View from South Africa’, *Journal of African History*, 54, 3 (2013), pp. 31–49.

4 Special issue, ‘Liberation Struggles, Exile and International Solidarity’, *Journal of Southern African Studies (JSAS)*, 35, 2 (2009); special issue, ‘Rethinking Empire in Southern Africa’, *JSAS*, 41, 3 (2015); A. MacDonald, ‘Strangers in a Strange Land: Undesirables and Border Controls in Colonial Durban, 1897–c. 1910’, MA dissertation, University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, 2007; ‘Colonial Trespassers in the Making of South Africa’s International Borders 1900 to c. 1950’, PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2012.

5 N. Worden, ‘New Approaches to VOC History in South Africa’, *South African Historical Journal*, 59 (2007), pp. 3–18; K. Ward, *Networks of Empire: Forced Migration and the Dutch East India Company* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008); P. Harries, *Work, Culture, and Identity: Migrant Labourers in Mozambique and South Africa, c. 1860–1910* (London, James Currey, 1994); U. Dhupelia-Mesthrie, ‘Paper Regimes’, special issue of *Kronos*, 40, 1 (2014); J. Hyslop, ‘Zulu Sailors in the Steamship Era: The African Modern in the World Voyage Narratives of Fulunge Mpofo and George Magodini, 1916–1924’, in F. Paisley and K. Reid (eds), *Critical Perspectives on Colonialism: Writing the Empire from Below* (London, Routledge, 2014), pp. 123–40; J. Hyslop, ‘Eugene O’Neill and Other Undesirables of Durban Harbour: Policing the Global Maritime Labour Force in Natal, c.1890–1930’, available at http://www.academia.edu/3893457/Eugene_O'Neill_and_other_undesirables_of_Durban_Harbour_Policing_the_Global_Maritime_Labour_Force_in_Natal_c.1890-1930, retrieved 10 July 2015.

and movement, a fair share of it within the Indian Ocean arena.⁶ These histories of ‘latitudinal’ migration speak to contemporary concerns of world history, resituating the genealogies of European empires in a longer archive of non-Western transnational intellectual formations while illuminating ‘webs of empire’, colony-to-colony movement and non-Western creolisations. Taken together, these cross-cutting concerns of non-Western histories and inter-colonial exchanges provide one site for understanding the pre-histories of the global south.

As a field, Indian Ocean studies first assumed a strong visibility in the early 1990s. Prior to this period, Indian Ocean studies had little coherence and was dispersed across a number of fields: the Swahili coast, studies of Indian Ocean islands, Portuguese imperial history, scholarship on Indian maritime history and Western Australian-driven analyses of its ocean ‘hinterland’.

The fortunes of this field were, however, considerably boosted by the end of the Cold War, the advent of the ‘Asian century’ and the rise of the global south. Since the 1990s, there has been an explosion of activity – monographs, centres, journals, and conferences, with a Cambridge history on its way.⁷ This work traverses early modern themes of trade, slavery and Islam; the carceral labour assemblages of the age of European empires; ‘information ports’, the rise of steam, print and telegraph and trans-oceanic public spheres; inter-imperial and sub-imperial themes; as well as studies of transnational institutions such as law, piracy, ecology, religion, science and technology, health and medicine.

South African scholarly interest in the Indian Ocean emerged or re-emerged (if one considers early work on the Portuguese maritime empire) as a post-apartheid phenomenon, and hence arose at much the same time as the field of Indian Ocean studies was consolidating itself elsewhere.⁸ Southern African work has been important in the enterprise as a whole and has played a part in re-inserting Africa more prominently into the Indian Ocean world. In part, this corpus of southern African research draws on earlier ‘minoritised’ histories of South African Indian communities and Cape slavery. Through an Indian Ocean optic, these have been woven into a broader canvas which has resituated Cape Town as an Indian Ocean port city; located Durban and Cape Town as nodes of maritime border- and state-making; and re-centred South African Muslim traditions by drawing out their trajectories in the Indian Ocean world.⁹ Another focus has been on the range of political imaginaries that emerge from southern Africa in the Indian Ocean world, where a patchwork of sovereignties overlaid with diasporic and religious

6 A.M. McKeown, *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2011); S.S. Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal: The Furies of Nature and the Fortunes of Migrants* (Boston, Harvard University Press, 2013); MacDonald, ‘Strangers’; ‘Colonial Trespassers’.

7 There is now a range of histories devoted to the Indian Ocean: M. Pearson, *The Indian Ocean* (London, Routledge, 2003); E.A. Alpers, *The Indian Ocean in World History* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2014); S. Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Boston, Harvard University Press, 2009). Centres dealing with the Indian Ocean include the Indian Ocean World Centre, McGill University, and the Centre for Indian Studies in Africa, University of the Witwatersrand. The *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* is produced by the Indian Ocean Research Group based at Curtin University, Australia. The *Cambridge History of the Indian Ocean* is to be edited by a team under the leadership of Sugata Bose.

8 I. Hofmeyr, ‘South Africa’s Indian Ocean – Notes from Johannesburg’, *History Compass*, 11, 7 (2013), pp. 508–12.

9 Worden, ‘New Approaches’; Ward, *Networks*; MacDonald, ‘Strangers’; MacDonald, ‘Colonial Trespassers’; J. Hyslop, ‘Navigating Empire: Ports, Ships and Global History’, keynote address at Social History Society conference, Portsmouth, UK, 1 April 2015; J. Hyslop, ‘Durban as a Portal of Globalization: Mines, Railways, Docks and Steamships in the Empire of Otto Siedle’s Natal Direct Line, 1879–1927’, available at http://www.academia.edu/6518222/Durban_as_a_Portal_of_Globalization_Mines_Railways_Docks_and_Steamships_in_the_Empire_of_Otto_Siedle_s_Natal_Direct_Line_1879-1927, retrieved 10 July 2015; J. Hyslop, ‘Durban Harbour in the Global Coal-Energy System 1886–1926: Bringing “Nature” into the Study of Local History’, available at http://www.academia.edu/6518300/Durban_Harbour_in_the_Global_Coal-Energy_System_1886-1926_Bringing_Nature_into_the_study_of_Local_History, retrieved 10 July 2015; Hyslop, ‘Eugene O’Neill’; A. Tayob, *Islam in South Africa: Mosques, Imams and Sermons* (Gainesville, University of Florida Press, 1999); P. Kaarsholm, ‘Zanzibaris or Amakhuwa?: Sufi Networks in South Africa, Mozambique and the Indian Ocean’, *Journal of African History*, 55, 2 (July 2014), pp. 191–210.

movements forged forms of belonging that exceed the nation state. Especially pertinent has been a long tradition of scholarship on Gandhi in South Africa, which has illuminated these modes of identity.¹⁰ More recently, there has been work tracking the movement of South Africans into the Indian Ocean world – Albert Luthuli, for example, travelled to India via ecumenical Protestant networks.¹¹ This work helps to offset what Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie has called the ‘one-way problem’, namely the tendency to focus only on South Asian movement into Africa rather than the reverse.¹² Yet another development has been in the literary domain, where scholars have put southern African literatures to sea as a way of revising existing (and implicitly land-based) interpretations.¹³

More broadly, this turn towards the Indian Ocean has started to weave together an ‘inland’ mining-capital-migrant-labour historiography with that of Cape slavery, which is increasingly being recognised as a laboratory for apartheid. This theme has been taken up by feminist scholars and writers such as Gabeba Baderoon, Pumla Dineo Gqola and Yvette Christiansë, one of whose literary characters – a slave woman, Sila – prophesies that ‘the contagion [of Cape slavery] will spread up, into land far from the sea’.¹⁴

This collection situates itself at the intersection of Indian Ocean and southern African studies and extends it in new directions.

Southern African Studies, Bonded Labour and the Indian Ocean

Due in large part to Clare Anderson’s pioneering work, the workings of the carceral archipelagos of the Indian Ocean world during the age of European empires are now well known. As she has demonstrated, forced labour, whether slave, penal, transported or indentured, was central to the building of colonial infrastructures and public works, and played a key role in dramatising spectacles of terror and punishment.¹⁵

10 On Gandhi, see U. Dhupelia-Mesthrie, *Gandhi’s Prisoner? The Life of Gandhi’s Son Manilal* (Cape Town, Kwela, 2004), and I. Hofmeyr, *Gandhi’s Printing Press: Experiments in Slow Reading* (Boston, Harvard University Press, 2013).

11 For travellers in the Indian Ocean world, see N. Erlank, ‘“God’s Family in the World”: Transnational and Local Ecumenism’s Impact on Inter-Church and Inter-Racial Dialogue in South Africa in the 1920s and 1930s’, *South African Historical Journal*, 61, 2 (2009), pp. 278–97; U. Dhupelia-Mesthrie, ‘Cultural Crossings from Africa to India: Select Travel Narratives of Indian South Africans from Durban and Cape Town, 1940s to 1990s’, *South African Historical Journal*, 64, 2 (2012), pp. 295–312; P. Gupta, ‘Mapping Portuguese Decolonisation in the Indian Ocean: A Research Agenda’, *South African Historical Journal*, 57, 1 (2007), pp. 93–112.

12 U. Dhupelia-Mesthrie, ‘The Place of India in South African History: Academic Scholarship, Past, Present and Future’, *South African Historical Journal* 57, 1 (2007), pp. 12–34.

13 This work has come from scholars like G. Baderoon, ‘The African Oceans: Tracing the Sea as Memory of Slavery in South African Literature and Culture’, *Research in African Literatures*, 40, 4 (2009), pp. 89–107; T. Steiner ‘Navigating Multilingually: The Chronotope of the Ship in Contemporary East African Fiction’, *English Studies in Africa*, 51, 2 (2008), pp. 49–58. Meg Samuelson is involved in a major project on South African literature and the sea. For some examples of this work, see M. Samuelson, ‘Yvette Christiansë’s Oceanic Genealogies and the Colonial Archive: “Castaways” and “Generations” from Eastern Africa to the South Atlantic’, *Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies*, 1, 1–2 (2014), pp. 27–38; M. Samuelson, ‘Sea-Changes, Dark Tides and Littoral States: Oceans and Coastlines in Post-Apartheid South African Narratives’, *Alternation* (special edition no. 6), 20, 3 (2013), pp. 9–28. For an overview of how southern African writers have engaged with maritime themes, see Samuelson, this issue.

14 Baderoon, ‘The African Oceans’; P. Gqola, *What is Slavery to Me? Postcolonial/Slave Memory in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2010); Y. Christiansë, *Unconfessed* (New York, Other Press, 2007); Y. Christiansë, *Imprendehora* (Cape Town, Kwela, 2009). The quotation is from Meg Samuelson, this volume.

15 C. Anderson, *Convicts in the Indian Ocean: Transportation from South Asia to Mauritius, 1815–53* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); ‘Convicts and Coolies: Rethinking Indentured Labour in the Nineteenth Century’, *Slavery and Abolition*, 30, 1 (2009), pp. 93–109; *Subaltern Lives: Biographies of Colonialism in the Indian Ocean World, 1790–1920* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Scholars such as Nigel Worden and Kerry Ward, working on the ‘Cape cauldron’ of slavery and its role in early modern European empires, have intersected with this work. The first three essays in the volume explore these intersections, delineating the south-east African seaboard (including Cape Town) as a ‘system’ or region making up the ‘inter-regional arena’ of the Indian Ocean world and beyond. In this account, Africa’s eastern seaboard constitutes a fault-line or seam that articulates and disarticulates a series of networks: African hinterland societies, ancient land and sea trade routes, Swahili coastal cultures, Muslim networks, South Asian merchants, Portuguese coastal and inland enclaves, slave networks (both pre-existing and European-initiated) – all drawn into a growing sub-continental system of war and extractive labour.

Nigel Worden places this seaboard slave trade in a larger Indian Ocean arena, showing a long-term shift from an intra-Asian to an intra-African trade between the late 17th and early 19th centuries. Patrick Harries tracks the Mozambique island/Cape Town axis that was pivotal in this trade, and its articulations with the Caribbean and Brazil. Clare Anderson situates the Cape in a wider set of carceral connections in the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic occasioned by imperial policies and practices of punishment and confinement.

Worden’s article analyses demographic data from a four-year project based on the professional transcription of Cape household inventories generated on the death of the owner and running from 1695 to 1825. These inventories reflect privately (as opposed to Company-) owned slaves and list these by name and toponym, providing insight into the shifting demographics of privately owned slaves in Cape Town itself. The figures themselves highlight the prominence of slaves imported from south-east Africa vis-à-vis those from south-east Asia, and show a shift from Asian sources of Cape slaves (south Asia and south-east Asia) to African slaves first from Madagascar and then from Mozambique.

Harries examines the network of terror and capital that linked Mozambique island to the Cape, both through slave networks that passed through the port on their way to Atlantic destinations and through the slaves sold in the town itself. He brings to light the range of personal and business networks that linked settlers between Mozambique and Cape Town, and the creolised cultural forms brought by the slaves and ‘liberated Africans’ or ‘prize negroes’ (slaves ‘freed’ by British anti-slaving patrols and generally turned into indentured labourers).

Together these two pieces extend the growing debates on slavery (and its abolition) in the Indian Ocean world while revising the dominant view of Cape slavery as being dominated by south-east Asia.¹⁶ As Worden indicates, the presence of African slaves in Cape Town made the town resemble Port Louis rather than the Dutch south-east Asian slave ports. This African presence raises questions for how the slave past is currently remembered or might be re-remembered to take account of this past. As Worden points out, there are some steps being taken to memorialise the largely forgotten south Asian dimensions of Cape slavery. The African presence, however, has as yet not been acknowledged beyond academic work. Like many Indian Ocean histories that involve forms of transnational memory that have been erased by nation, empire or world religion, this is another instance of a ‘drowned’ history that raises challenging questions for those involved in public history and memorialisation.

The presence of liberated Africans in Cape Town from the 1820s points to another important theme, namely the interaction between migrant labour on land and migrant labour at sea. As Harries points out, the ‘liberated Africans’ constituted the first and most visible group

16 G. Campbell, ‘Slavery and Other Forms of Unfree Labour in the Indian Ocean World’, in G. Campbell (ed.), *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (London, Frank Cass, 2004), pp. vii–xxxii; R.B. Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500–1850* (Athens, Ohio University Press, 2014); A. Stanziani, *Sailors, Slaves and Immigrants: Bondage in the Indian Ocean World, 1750–1914* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); R. Harms, B.K. Freamon, and D.W. Blight (eds), *Indian Ocean Slavery in the Age of Abolition* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2013).

of African migrants in Cape Town, followed in the 1860s by those coming via land. This conjuncture raises the question of how maritime and land-based migration might be brought into the same analytical frame. This juxtaposition of slavery and migration aligns with debates on the articulation of systems of unfree labour in the Indian Ocean world. These in turn unsettle any trajectory of slavery to free labour as the norm.¹⁷ Preben Kaarsholm's article (of which more below) underlines this point, highlighting the porous boundaries between indenture, enslavement, forced labour, 'liberated' slaves, and penal labour, and the colonial deployment of these categories to racialise different groups.

As Clare Anderson argues, convict labour

was an interstitial moment in the transition from the private to public management of coerced labour more generally. It was part of a larger shift from enslavement to apprenticeship and ultimately the entry of ex-slaves into wage labour, accompanied by new kinds of coercion, notably Liberated African apprenticeship and the introduction of Asian indentured labour.

As her article indicates, these forms of coerced labour articulate globally with sites in the Cape being linked to convict hulks in Bermuda that were destined for the Cape (but were turned back by settler opposition) and indentured child labour from the Isle of Wight. Alessandro Stanziani recently suggests a similar theme, tracing sites of unfree labour across Europe and the Indian Ocean and suggesting that both sailors and indentured immigrants constituted a kind of 'disguised slavery'.¹⁸

As Anderson's pioneering work has long shown, these carceral networks stretched across and beyond the Indian Ocean world, creating the basis of imperial infrastructure, sovereignty and power.¹⁹ In this issue of *JSAS*, she extends her work to the Cape, demonstrating how Robben Island acted as an important comparative point in larger debates on policies of imperial punishment, anti-slavery, penal reform and the management of indigenous people as a labour resource. She further demonstrates how Robben Island and the Cape formed part of larger penal assemblages: as a site of transshipment of prisoners; as a destination for juvenile offenders, transportation orphans and pauper children; and as a suggested site of penal transportation (a move ultimately resisted by settlers). These networks placed the Cape in inter-colonial and inter-imperial networks that stretched to the Mascarene Islands, south-east Asia, Australia, and the Atlantic World.

As Anderson points out, islands and port cities have become important analytical nodes in oceanic and inter-imperial forms of history, where the idea of the 'empire of bases' (or base empires) has become prominent, a network of enclaves that underwrites the extractive logics of empire.²⁰ Colonial port cities have long been recognised as key instances of such enclaves, the bridgeheads, portals and gateways that funnel European power. As one critic notes: '[t]o study colonialism is to study port cities'.²¹

This world of coerced mobility has long raised questions of cultural creolisation. In a paper presented at the conference but not included here, Heloise Finch-Boyer provides a ship-board perspective on the cosmopolitan corridor along the south-east African coast, which included American whalers, Gujarati merchants, Nguni adventurers, Bengali agents, lascars, escaped slaves from the Seychelles with facility in Arabic and French. The range of languages was equally diverse: Nguni dialects, Arabic, Swahili, Gujarati, Bengali, Dutch, English, Portuguese,

17 Anderson, *Subaltern Lives*; Stanziani, *Sailors*; Harms, Freamon and Blight (eds), *Indian Ocean Slavery*.

18 Stanziani, *Sailors*, 94/4558 (electronic edition).

19 Anderson, *Convicts*; *Subaltern Lives*.

20 D. Vine, *Island of Shame: The Secret History of the US Military Base of Diego Garcia* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 42.

21 Ç. Keyder, Y.E. Özveren and D. Quataert, 'Port-Cities in the Ottoman Empire: Some Theoretical and Historical Perspectives', *Review* (Fernand Braudel Center), 16, 4 (1993), p. 520.

French, Hindustani, Malagasy.²² For some, with an orientation to extraversion, this world opened up opportunities for picaresque manoeuvre and mobility. This facility of tactical cosmopolitanism characterised much African movement and diaspora in the insular world of the western Indian Ocean, where, as Pier Larson has demonstrated, African languages had persisted in slave communities.²³ Yet, as the Africanist scholarship on Indian Ocean creolisation has demonstrated, no cosmopolitanism was ever straightforward.²⁴ Cosmopolitan interactions were generally conscripted and brought about through forced migration. This scholarship from an African perspective has helped to complicate some of the more sanguine versions of Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism.

What part did port cities play in these carceral assemblages? The following three articles explore this question, looking back to earlier themes, namely ancient Indian Ocean trade routes and entangled forms of unfree labour (slavery/abolition/indenture/forced labour) and forward to questions about the nature of the 20th-century South African state and its attempts to police the global colour line through its littoral borders.

Southern African Studies and Port Cities

In the 21st century, there has been a small but growing body of social history scholarship on port cities prompted by the oceanic and transnational turn throughout the academy. This literature, pioneered by Andrew Macdonald and Jonathan Hyslop, looks back to older historiographies on the nodes of the British imperial maritime world and to more recent work on Atlantic port cities and a long tradition of work on Asian port cities both pre-colonial and colonial.²⁵ This seaward turn has entailed a return to older ‘imperial factor’ historiographies of southern Africa but via the route of social history.²⁶ These older themes (confederation through customs and railways, the maritime colonies versus the inland republics, competition between Natal and Cape ports) have been revisited from below through the lens of migration, maritime border-making and colonial governance.²⁷

This southern African material on port cities dovetails with a broader body of work on these themes. The Asian port city historiography outlines a shift from pre-colonial to colonial ports: either existing ports overlaid with European authority or *de novo* colonial creations. This shift entailed a relocation of political centres of power previously located inland (Delhi, Kandy,

22 H. Finch-Boyer, ‘Southern African Port Towns and the Shaping of Indian Ocean Cosmopolitanisms in the Early 19th Century’, paper presented to a workshop, ‘Durban and Cape Town as Indian Ocean Port Cities: Reconsidering Southern African Studies from the Indian Ocean’, Centre for Humanities Research, University of the Western Cape, 11–14 September, 2014.

23 P. Larson, *Ocean of Letters: Language and Creolization in an Indian Ocean Diaspora* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009).

24 The classic statement on Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism is A. Ghosh, *In an Antique Land* (London, Granta, 1992). For Africanist perspectives, see F. Becker and J. Cabrita, ‘Introduction: Performing Citizenship and Enacting Exclusion on Africa’s Indian Ocean Littoral’, *Journal of African History*, 55, 2 (2014), pp. 161–71; J. Soske, ‘“Wash me Black Again”: African Nationalism, the Indian Diaspora, and Kwa-Zulu Natal, 1944–1960’, PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 2009; A. Burton, *Brown Over Black: Race and the Politics of Postcolonial Citation* (Gurgaon, Three Essays Collective, 2012); I. Hofmeyr, ‘Africa as a Faultline in the Indian Ocean’, in P. Gupta, I. Hofmeyr and M. Pearson (eds), *Eyes Across the Water: Navigating the Indian Ocean* (Pretoria, University of South Africa Press, 2010), pp. 99–108.

25 MacDonald, ‘Strangers’; ‘Colonial Trespassers’; Hyslop, ‘Durban as Portal’; ‘Durban as Harbour’; ‘Eugene O’Neill’; D. Killingray, M. Lincoln and N. Rigby (eds), *Maritime Empires: British Imperial Maritime Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (London, Boydell, 2004); H. Hughes, ‘African Encounters with the Sea: Durban and Beyond’, *Historia*, 59, 2 (2014), pp. 355–68.

26 J. van der Poel, *Railway and Customs Policies in South Africa 1885–1910* (London, Longmans, Green, 1933); B.A. Le Cordeur, ‘Natal, the Cape and the Indian Ocean, 1846–1880’, *Journal of African History*, 7, 2 (1966), pp. 247–62.

27 See footnote 25.

Mandalay, Angkor, Beijing) but by 1900 largely associated with major colonial ports (Bombay, Colombo, Singapore, Shanghai).²⁸

These ports become centres of settler diffusion and ecological change, transports hubs configuring steam and steel, energy depots, 'information ports' and communication portals, fortified and militarised sites of surveillance, nodes of smuggling and shadow economies. They functioned as funnels of 'concentrated exchange', through which religious, secularising and other intellectual influences flow, creating 'invisible empires' of colonised intellectual activity around and between port cities.²⁹ However, as sites with pre-imperial histories, these ports carried traces of their former lives through architecture, modes of trade, and forms of labour organisation.

Durban and Cape Town may seem entirely colonial inventions, yet they were equally sites where European authority encountered older Indian Ocean and African forms of association, sociality, labour organisation and trade. The articles demonstrate ways in which the colonial state takes shape at this fault-line, attempting to govern labour migration on land as much as on sea.

The articles by Kaarsholm and Dhupelia-Mesthrie are both located firmly in the port itself and illuminate this as a mode from which modes of governance are pioneered. Building on his current work on 'Zanzibaris' in Durban, Preben Kaarsholm investigates the office and workings of the Protector of Indian Immigrants, under whose authority a range of migrant groups fell: freed slaves, indentured labourers, migrant workers from Mozambique and forced labourers. Despite the Protector being a key figure in shaping colonial governance and categories of race, there has been virtually no work done on this seminal office. Kaarsholm outlines the establishment of the institution in the early 1870s and how it drew on precedents from other parts of the world, including the Protector of Slaves in Cape Town – a point that highlights shared expertise between these two port cities. The position of Protector in Natal was established at a time when indentured labour from India to Natal had temporarily been halted, and the first 'wards' of the Protector were a relay of freed slaves, mostly taken from northern Mozambique. Kaarsholm delineates the extensive and paternalistic powers that the Protector exercised over his subjects, and how the office was designed to create legitimacy for the colonial state by differentiating the 'enlightened' post-abolition labour practices of the British empire as opposed to those of the Portuguese or Boers. Through his office, he articulated and invented various racial, labour and religious categories by juxtaposing different groups and categories of governance.

Dhupelia-Mesthrie, a pioneer scholar of immigration regulation, focuses on the port of arrival as an analytical node.³⁰ As she indicates, this vantage point illuminates a new set of characters and points of view, shifting our attention from older historiographical concerns with the place of origin and ethnicity of immigrants towards a larger global view, which brings immigrants from around the world into the picture. Within this frame, she adopts a biographical method,

28 F. Broeze (ed.), *Brides of the Sea: Port Cities of Asia from the 16th to the 20th Centuries* (Sydney, New South Wales University Press, 1989); R. Murphy, 'On the Evolution of the Port City', in Broeze (ed.), *Brides*, pp. 223–43; D.K. Basu, 'Perspectives on the Colonial Port City in Asia', in D.K. Basu (ed.), *The Rise and Growth of the Colonial Port Cities in Asia* (Santa Cruz, Center for South Pacific Studies, University of California, 1979), pp. xix–xxx; K. McPherson, 'Port Cities as Nodal Points of Change: The Indian Ocean, 1890s–1920s', in L.T. Fawaz and C.A. Bayly (eds), *Modernity and Culture: From the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 75–95.

29 Quotes from Broeze (ed.), *Brides*, p. 227; J.R.I. Cole, 'Printing and Urban Islam in the Mediterranean World, 1890–1920', in Fawaz and Bayly (eds), *Modernity*, p. 344; T.N. Harper, 'Empire, Diaspora and the Languages of Globalism, 1850–1914', in A.G. Hopkins (ed.), *Globalization in World History* (London, Pimlico, 2002), pp. 141–66.

30 U. Mesthrie, 'Reducing the Indian Population to a "Manageable Compass": A Study of the South African Assisted Emigration Scheme of 1927', *Natalia*, 15 (1985), pp. 36–56; Dhupelia-Mesthrie, 'Paper Regimes'; U. Dhupelia-Mesthrie, 'False Fathers, False Sons: Immigration Officials in Cape Town, Documents and Verifying Minors from India in the First Half of the Twentieth Century', *Kronos*, 40 (2014), pp. 99–132.

looking at those who peopled the state apparatus, in this case the civil servant Clarence Wilfrid Cousins, who served more than a decade of a long government career as an immigration officer.

Based on official and private papers, this article captures a multi-dimensional view of Cousins: 'hard-working civil servant, Bible class teacher, choir master and organist, history examiner, woodwork enthusiast and cat killer' (he exterminated stray kittens). Born to Protestant missionaries in Madagascar, he was educated in England but moved to Cape Town, which offered greater opportunities. Raised in a Victorian environment (with a largely absent father), Cousins' life was marked by system and conscientiousness, a talent that he honed in his immigration work, where he designed or adapted much of the paperwork, forms, writing tests and regulations that governed entry and exit from Cape Town. These procedures were constantly tightened to screen out all those who were not white, were imperfectly white, or were disabled: undesirable Portuguese, 'scarcely European' Madeirans, 'weedily-looking' Greeks, those who were 'degenerate or half-imbecile', 'lunatics', paupers, consumptives, and 'wily Orientals', against whom Cousins waged a particular battle and for whom he designed special registration forms, which required thumbprints and photographs. His 'cleaning up' of the stray kittens was one instance writ small of this greater desire to remove 'undesirables' from society. As Dhupelia-Mesthrie points out, this logic prepared the ground in which segregation and apartheid took root.

As Andrew MacDonald's early work on Durban as a port has demonstrated, the attempts to police entry and exit from this entrepot need to be bracketed with the rich scholarship on the 'Durban system', a set of measures designed to police urban space and manage the multi-racial lumpenproletariat of the city. As MacDonald elegantly shows, this story of labour control on land needs to be joined up with 'immigrants queueing at the harbour mouth' and the increasing militarisation and fortification of the architecture of the port itself³¹ – or, to use the phrasing in his article, the 'logic of the compound' meets that of the 'port of exit'.

MacDonald's work on the social histories of border and border-making forms parts of a larger historiography on global migrations and their shaping of modern ideas of borders, sovereignty and citizenship. It demonstrates that a view from the border reveals the 'fictions of state building' and the porousness of the state in the face of smuggling, shadow economies, piracy and 'illegal' immigration. This view of the leaky state intersects with recent work on the bureaucratic, regulatory and identification procedures of government, which make evident its contradictory and vainglorious impulses.³²

MacDonald's article in this collection extends these themes by focusing on the intersection of the centuries-old gold trade from present-day Zimbabwe to South Asia and the emergence of industrial gold mining on the Rand. In a well-known Indian Ocean theme, this older trade adapted itself to new colonial structures and enabled gold to be smuggled out of the mining centres of the Rand. As he demonstrates, the pre-colonial trade had depended on an extended lattice of 'co-operative networking', involving peasant producer, porter, middleman, merchant, sailor. The new gold network drew on some of this older personnel but added new ones, creating a polyglot cast of picaresque 'rascals' who smuggled amalgam, gold coin and jewellery from Durban, Lourenço Marques and Beira to a range of Indian Ocean destinations mainly in British India but including some in south-east Asia. In a method that would do the material turn in transnational history proud, MacDonald ingeniously traces the different methods for sourcing, smelting and smuggling amalgam, as well as other sources of gold. As he shows, the state's response was generally flat-footed, and its increased surveillance methods proved only fitfully effective.

31 MacDonald 'Strangers', p. 33.

32 MacDonald, 'Strangers'; McKeown, *Melancholy Order*; Dhupelia-Mesthrie, 'Paper Regimes'; K. Breckenridge, *The Biometric State: The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014); J. Klaaren, 'Migrating to Citizenship: Mobility, Law, and Nationality in South Africa, 1897–1937', PhD thesis, Yale University, 2004.

Like all transnational work, these articles draw on a wide range of archival sources dispersed across numerous sites. Works that draw on archives across national boundaries succeed in making connections between histories and places that are otherwise not seen as connected. This is particularly seen in the contributions of Anderson, Harries and MacDonald in this issue. Authors also attempt to work with and against ‘the archival grain’ by juxtaposing different kinds of archival sources, and thereby penetrate the ‘inaccessibility of archives’, which Ann Laura Stoler has identified as lying in ‘the principles that organised colonial governance and the “common sense” that underwrote what were deemed political issues and how those issues traveled by paper through the bureaucratic pathways of the colonial administration’.³³ Worden gains new understanding of Cape slavery, placing private estate and household documents alongside Dutch East India Company records, and Harries draws on new knowledge on the Portuguese and French Indian Ocean slave trade recently obtained despite the deliberate destruction of archival records.³⁴ Kaarsholm obtains glimpses of insight into the subaltern lives of ‘liberated Africans’ and indentured labourers through records of court cases and colonial scandals unsuccessfully hushed up, and Dhupelia-Mesthrie breaks through the respectable facade of immigration administration by adding perspectives of personal and family biography.

Dhupelia-Mesthrie has argued elsewhere that

South African archival collections and systems of registration bear all the hallmarks of segregation. These lead to segregated histories, and the challenge for the historian is to overcome the way in which these segregated archival collections produce knowledge that reinforces segregation. It is no longer enough for the historian to read the archive for a social history of its segregated subjects; the historian needs to break the walls and boundaries of these very archives.

The articles in this issue make some contribution to what she calls the ‘crumbling of archival walls’.³⁵

Oceanic Biographies

In her recent work *Muslim Cosmopolitanism in the Age of Empire*, Seema Alavi speaks of ‘biography as the archive for writing world history’.³⁶ The biographical method that several articles use here is one that has come to characterise much southern African studies’ work on the Indian Ocean. No doubt because of its strong social history underpinning, southern African work on the Indian Ocean has produced a rich vein of scholarship which we might term ‘Indian Ocean careering’, drawing on Lambert and Lester’s terms ‘imperial careering’.³⁷ Several articles rely on biography wholly or in part, outlining the figures who made careers in and across the Indian Ocean, whether the immigrant official, Cousins (discussed by Dhupelia-Mesthrie), the gold smuggler Hira Naran (in MacDonald’s article), or Protector of Indian Immigrants Murdoch McLeod (in Kaarsholm’s article). Indeed, MacLeod, as Kaarsholm indicates, had, like many other figures in the Natal colonial state, a military background, having served in various Indian campaigns.

Goolam Vahed’s article continues in this tradition and tracks the many lives of Moosa Haje Cassim, merchant, property baron, ship owner, mosque builder, philanthropist, political

33 A.L. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 9.

34 Allen, *European Slave Trading*; P. Machado, *Ocean of Trade: South Asian Merchants, Africa and the Indian Ocean, c. 1750–1850* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014).

35 U. Dhupelia-Mesthrie, ‘Paper Regimes’, pp. 17–18.

36 S. Alavi, *Muslim Cosmopolitanism in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2015) 252/10007 (electronic edition). See also A. Games, ‘Beyond the Atlantic: English Globetrotters and Transoceanic Connections’, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 63, 4 (2006), pp. 675–92.

37 D. Lambert and A. Lester (eds), *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010).

leader. Cassim was a ‘passenger’ Indian, and Vahed uses his life story to illuminate the source difficulties associated with studying this community, but also how recently discovered material is revising the social profile of this group. The article also contributes to a growing body of work on travellers into the Indian Ocean world, disrupting the image of a one-way movement from South Asia to southern Africa.³⁸

While Cassim came from Porbandar, he maintained two homes and moved constantly between Natal and Gujarat. The article illuminates the particular demands and talents required to maintain such a transnational domestic life and career. Initially a partnership among five brothers, Cassim’s business empire sprawled across Porbandar, Durban, the Orange Free State (briefly, before Asians were expelled) and Mozambique. Like many Indian Ocean traders, he was permanently itinerant, mastering the art of getting and passing on information, the prime commodity of merchant networks.³⁹

Anne Bang, in a paper presented at the workshop but not included here,⁴⁰ examines another type of mobile biography, this time of itinerant Muslim intellectuals, often travelling *da’wa* scholars who brought ‘ocean-born’ reform-oriented versions of Islam to port cities, where they were trumped by local religious practices. These travelling scholars form part of the world created by steam and print, which, as a recent collection indicates, ‘enabled Muslims to redefine the geographies they inhabited, on both the concrete and conceptual levels’, through ‘steam-driven’ Muslim reform movements.⁴¹

Oceanic Ontologies

The two final articles introduce an important dimension of oceanic studies, namely the question of how one factors in the ‘sea-ness of the sea’. As a growing body of work demonstrates, much oceanic history has little to say about the ocean itself, which generally remains a passive background for human mobility.⁴² As Philip Steinberg observes, much oceanic history ‘makes for a curiously static and empty conception of the sea, in which it serves merely as a framework for historical investigations, rather than being something with a lively and energetic materiality of its own’.⁴³ How do we take account of the ‘wet, mobile, dynamic, deep, dark’ nature of the ocean, characterised by ‘interdependencies of water molecules, minerals, and non-human biota as well as humans and their ship’?⁴⁴ How might one write histories of the sea that factor in the human, non-human (animals, plants, technology), more-than-human (infrastructure)

38 See footnote 11.

39 S. Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2011).

40 A. Bang, ‘Cape Town as Entry Point for Early 20th Century Indian Ocean Flows of Islamic Reformism: Division and Unity in an Ocean-wide Context’, paper presented at the workshop ‘Durban and Cape Town as Indian Ocean Port Cities: Reconsidering Southern African Studies from the Indian Ocean’, Centre for Humanities Research, University of the Western Cape, 11–14 September 2014.

41 J.L. Gelvin and N. Green, ‘Introduction: Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print’, in J.L. Gelvin and N. Green (eds), *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2014), p. 3.

42 Philip E. Steinberg, ‘Of Other Seas: Metaphors and Materialities in Maritime Regions’, *Atlantic Studies*, 10, 2 (2013), pp. 156–69; G. Gordillo, ‘The Oceanic Void’, available at <http://spaceandpolitics.blogspot.co.uk/2014/04/the-oceanic-void.html>, retrieved 10 July 2015; A. Anim-Addo, ‘“A Wretched and Slave-like Mode of Labour”: Slavery, Emancipation, and the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company’s Coaling Station’, *Historical Geography*, 39 (2011), pp. 65–84; J. Anderson and K. Peters, ‘A Perfect and Absolute Blank: Human Geographies of Water Worlds’, in J. Anderson and K. Peters (eds), *Water Worlds: Human Geographies of the Ocean* (London, Ashgate, 2014), pp. 3–19; E. Deloughrey, ‘Heavy Waters: Waste and Atlantic Modernity’, *PMLA*, 125, 3 (2010), pp. 703–12.

43 Steinberg, ‘Of Other Seas’, p. 169.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 159.

and less-than-human (wind, sea, current, thermodynamics, plankton)?⁴⁵ From a variety of disciplines, scholars have started to explore these questions.

One important intervention in these debates has come from literary scholars, who have used narratives of the sea as a way of thinking about oceanic ontologies. From shipwreck narratives onwards, stories of the sea enact a radical sense of catastrophe that splinters the known world and its common-sense epistemologies. Or, as Leslie Eckel notes in her discussion of Atlantic literature and the ‘global chaosmos’, sea narratives can position us ‘on “the edge of knowledge”, facing the incomprehensible and the theoretically impossible’.⁴⁶ By paying attention to what the ocean does in narrative, such studies raise questions about the impossible ontologies of the ocean and how these destroy any systems designed to make sense of them.

The articles by Meg Samuelson and Charne Lavery grapple with these questions, and, in an amphibian move, take us both offshore and underwater. Samuelson considers the long arc of representations of the Cape-as-port, framed by three recurring tropes: *Hoerikwaggo* or ‘Sea-Mountain’, the Khoikhoi name for Table Mountain, a place in which land and sea interact; ‘Cape of Storms’, whose rounding proved so tempestuous; and the imperially optimistic ‘Cape of Good Hope’. At the centre of these configurations sits Adamastor, the figure who erupts in Luís Vaz de Camões’s *Os Lusíadas* (1572; trans. *The Lusíads*). In much literary scholarship, Adamastor has been interpreted from a land perspective, and is seen as representing the Cape, or at times the whole continent. Samuelson, by contrast, interprets this figure from offshore, seeing him as a ‘figure of the maritime imagination rather than as an allegory of the Cape – or the continent – in fundamental opposition to the ocean’.

Samuelson traces the disappearing horizon of the sea during the apartheid era, as ‘the poetics of ports and passages fade as attention is directed inward to the nationalist struggle’. Post-apartheid, several writers re-introduce the sea, ‘that player on the Cape stage which is so readily overlooked’, to use novelist Dan Sleigh’s formulation. These texts ‘revisit the origins and aftermaths of segregation and creolisation in the early Cape’, and re-introduce maritime themes into the narrative of South Africa. Throughout the article, Samuelson develops an amphibian mode of reading, tracking between land and sea, avoiding the binary opposition established between the two. She also pays close attention to what the sea is doing in each text, tracing its currents, still zones, pounding and booming.

Charne Lavery discusses sea literature of a different type, namely novels dealing with the Indian Ocean underworld of drugs, terror and smuggling, a maritime sub-genre of crime fiction that has burgeoned in post-apartheid South Africa. The article returns us to earlier themes – smuggling, shadow economies and the porous state – while exploring the fictional traces of these networks in the 20th and 21st centuries. Lavery examines two crime novels, one set in Durban, the other in Cape Town. The former imagines the city as ‘a meeting-point of numerous overlapping and criss-crossing lines of illegal migration, terrorism and espionage ... in which Durban is a convenient port and point of access into the rest of continental Africa’. The latter novel deals with abalone smuggling between Cape Town and Taipei. As Lavery notes, this novel takes us underwater: ‘The idea of the underworld can in this sense also be extended to the undersea ... in this case, fish, molluscs and other kinds of oceanic life forms’.

This engagement with the ‘undersea’ has recently been discussed by Lindsay Bremner in an article, ‘Fluid Ontologies in the Search for MH370’, which tracked the search for a Malaysian airliner. The article uses the international search operation for the airline in the Indian Ocean as an occasion to speculate on remote and deep ocean space, ‘a privileged, if tragic, moment

⁴⁵ See footnote 42.

⁴⁶ L.E. Eckel, ‘Oceanic Mirrors: Atlantic Literature and the Global Chaosmos’, *Atlantic Studies: Global Currents*, 11, 1 (2014), pp. 131.

to see beyond a world constructed by humans and to get a little closer to understanding the properties of the ocean itself'.⁴⁷

The directions suggested here by Samuelson, Lavery and Bremner pose radical interdisciplinary challenges, namely: how do we combine humanistic pursuits such as social history with very different disciplines such as oceanography and hydrology? Or, put differently, can one have a post-human history of the ocean?

Conclusion: Beyond the Indian Ocean?

One theme across several of these articles is how global networks outstrip the limits of the Indian Ocean: migrants from both east and west who land at Cape Town, or a south-east African slave trade that funnels captives to the Caribbean and Brazil. As scholarship on global systems expands, so too does the recognition that such processes exceed hemispheric, oceanic, continental or indeed any other intellectual boundaries, undoing the myths of continents, oceans and empires. These shifts in turn shake up previously 'settled' areas, be these 'southern Africa', 'Africa' or indeed Indian Ocean, or for that matter the Atlantic, both a kind of area studies at sea.

Yet to abandon these categories in favour of the global would promote bland and placeless historical narratives. Instead we need both regional and global perspectives, or, to extend Sugata Bose's much-quoted phrase, we need to think in terms of 'inter-regional arenas'.⁴⁸ The essays in this collection offer a range of methods for switching between these different levels. Some article follow people and commodities as they move through space, tracking slave ships, merchants, smugglers and gold. Others, by contrast, focus on one site, such as the port city, to examine how these channel a range of global mobilities. Together these articles offer ways of articulating areas of southern Africa that have largely remained discrete: migration on land, forced labour and migration by sea, colonial governance, maritime border-making, pre-colonial transoceanic trade and slave routes, the mining revolution, and finally the ocean itself – both its surface and its depths.

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47 L. Bremner, 'Fluid Ontologies in the Search for MH370', *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, 11, 1 (2015), pp. 8–29.

48 Bose, *A Hundred Horizons*, p. 3.